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Washington, D.C. 20520

July 20, 1981

Dear Senator Hayakawa:

I am responding to your letter of June 22 to Secretary Haig regarding the deployment of American AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia, and the impact that theater deployment might have on U.S. Air Force operational readiness. I understand that the Department of Defense is preparing a reply to your June 19 letter to Secretary Weinberger which will address the technical questions you have raised.

As you know, the original commitment of AWACS to the security of the Saudi oil fields was made by the previous Administration with the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Secretary participated fully in the new Administration's review of this decision, and shares its conclusion that the continued deployment of the American aircraft is in the best interest of our national security.

We share your concern, of course, that this commitment could reduce U.S. capability to respond to unforeseen contingencies that might develop elsewhere in the world. However, the continuing tension in the Persian Gulf region, the long-standing friendly relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, and the importance of ensuring the security of American and Western oil supplies lends this decision priority over other claims in the present context.

As you know, the President has decided to respond favorably to Saudi Arabia's request to purchase the AWACS system in order to enable them to enhance their own ability to defend their oil production facilities. This will not only reduce the demand for American resources in future crisis but will provide additional assets to U.S. forces which might be called upon to operate in the area. We strongly believe that this sale and the strengthening of Saudi Arabia's defensive capabilities will serve us as well as Saudi national security interests.

The Saudis understand that the effectiveness of the AWACS system depends upon a tactical data and command and control ground support system, and are presently developing plans to create the necessary infrastructure. They are

The Honorable
S. I. Hayakawa,
United States Senate.

consulting closely with us in this effort, and the training and support programs we develop should ensure that the final integrated system will be sufficient to meet the Kingdom's legitimate air defense needs and will perform reliably. American technicians will provide extensive training in operation and maintenance of the equipment, and U.S. contractor representatives are expected to remain in-country on a continuing basis to ensure reliable performance of this American-supplied equipment.

Please be assured that the Secretary welcomes your interest in this important matter of American national security.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Fairbanks
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

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